



# Monthly Threat Update

June 2020



Pool Re

## SOLUTIONS

Building resilience against terrorism risk

## Threat overview

Threat from terrorism to the UK:

**Critical:** an attack is highly likely in the near future

**Severe:** an attack is highly likely

**Substantial:** an attack is likely

**Moderate:** an attack is possible but not likely

**Low:** an attack is highly unlikely

Threat from Northern Ireland related terrorism to Northern Ireland:

*There was one terrorist attack in Great Britain this month; a bladed weapons attack against members of the public in a park in Reading. The frequency of attacks across Western Europe is likely to increase as countries begin to ease restrictions imposed in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As lockdowns are eased, the opportunities for mass casualty attacks will increase and planned attacks, deferred due to the pandemic, may now materialise.*

Elsewhere, US law enforcement disrupted a plot by an American soldier to attack his own unit. According to the indictment, the soldier passed intelligence on the movements of his unit to a Satanic, Neo-Nazi group known as the Order of Nine Angles (O9A). Such plots highlight the enduring threat from 'insiders' and the problem of right-wing extremists joining the military to access weapons, training and intelligence which can be used in attack planning.

In Africa, French forces killed the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) during a military operation in northern Mali. Abdelmalek Droukdel was the leader of AQIM and its precursor groups since 2004 and was largely responsible for the group's expansion from Algeria across the Sahel. Droukdel's death is unlikely to affect the group's operations materially, and although it may seek to target Western interests locally in response, attacks in Europe by the group or its agents are unlikely.

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## Bladed weapons attack in Reading

A terrorist armed with a knife killed three people and wounded three others in Forbury Park in Reading, Berkshire, at around 19:00 on Saturday, 20 June. Police arrested the attacker five minutes after the first emergency services call. The victims were not known to the attacker and appear to have been targeted at random. Counter Terrorism Policing South East named the attacker as 25-year-old Libyan refugee Khairi Saadallah and said that it was treating the incident as a terrorism-related. As of 30 June, several roads around the site of the attack remained cordoned off.

Saadallah reportedly arrived in the UK as a refugee in 2012. At the time of the attack he was under supervision by the National Probation Service, having been released from prison for non-terrorist offences three weeks prior to the attack. It appears he suffered from mental health problems and had been radicalised online after viewing Islamist extremist propaganda.

According to security sources quoted in several media outlets, Saadallah came to the attention of MI5 in 2019 due to intelligence that he planned to travel to Syria for 'extremist purposes.' However, he was not assessed to represent an immediate risk and therefore no further investigations were carried out.

The incident was the third confirmed terrorist attack in Great Britain since the start of the year, following bladed weapon attacks in HMP Whitemoor and Streatham in January and February, respectively. In both instances, the ►



Police forensics officers dressed in Tyvek protective PPE (personal protective equipment) suits and wearing masks, conduct a search outside an entrance to Forbury Gardens park in Reading, west of London, on June 22, 2020, the scene of the June 20 stabbing spree. (Photo by BEN STANSALL/AFP via Getty Images)

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Police officers congregate outside a cordoned off block of flats where the suspect of a multiple stabbing incident lived in Reading, west of London, on June 23, 2020. (Photo by BEN STANSALL/AFP via Getty Images).

attackers were known to police or the security services, with one of the two HMP Whitemoor attackers in prison for terror offences.

The attack in Reading further illustrates the difficulty faced by MI5 and police in effectively managing the over 20,000 'former subjects of interest' (SOIs); individuals who have come to the attention of authorities, but who are not actively monitored due to resourcing constraints and other operational priorities. Given the string of recent attacks conducted by both former and current SOIs, how these individuals are managed by the police and intelligence services will likely be subject to further scrutiny. However, preventing effectively spontaneous 'low-complexity' attacks without infringements on civil liberties will remain challenging.

It is possible that Saadallah delayed his attack plans due to COVID-19-related restrictions and waited for a revival in public activity and the attendant increase in the number of potential high-density targets. As restrictions are lifted, there is a realistic possibility of further attacks by terrorists who deferred their plans in response to the pandemic.

There is a concern that COVID-related restrictions have led to vulnerable individuals becoming reclusive and spending more time online, which has made them more susceptible to being remotely radicalised by extremist organisations.

The counter-terrorist community is also concerned about the displacement of people away from crowded places historically targeted by terrorists (pubs,

nightclubs, markets etc.) to other types of 'crowded spaces' such as parks. The latter present a challenge to secure, both due to their inherently open nature, and lack of clarity over who is responsible for their security. Thus, the attack in Reading may help steer forthcoming policy reviews relating to crowded places/crowded spaces and potential legislation mandating additional counter-terrorism security at entertainment venues (known as Martyr's Law).

A police cordon was in effect for approximately one mile around the area for over 48 hours after the event, and a more limited cordon remained in place at the time of writing. While the attack caused no property damage, recent attacks have demonstrated the potential for businesses to sustain economic losses without incurring any damage, with police cordons often being the proximate cause of losses.

Since 2018, Pool Re has provided cover for business interruption caused by certified terror events where no property damage occurred. The attack in Reading would be considered under this cover. However, the level of business interruption can vary significantly depending on the timing and location of the incident. As the attack occurred late on a Saturday, interruption may have been less than if it had occurred during peak trading hours on a weekday. ■

[Read our most recent analysis of bladed weapon attacks in Europe here.](#)

[Read more about the impact Covid-19 is having on terrorism here.](#)

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## Suspected far-left terrorist arrested in Huddersfield

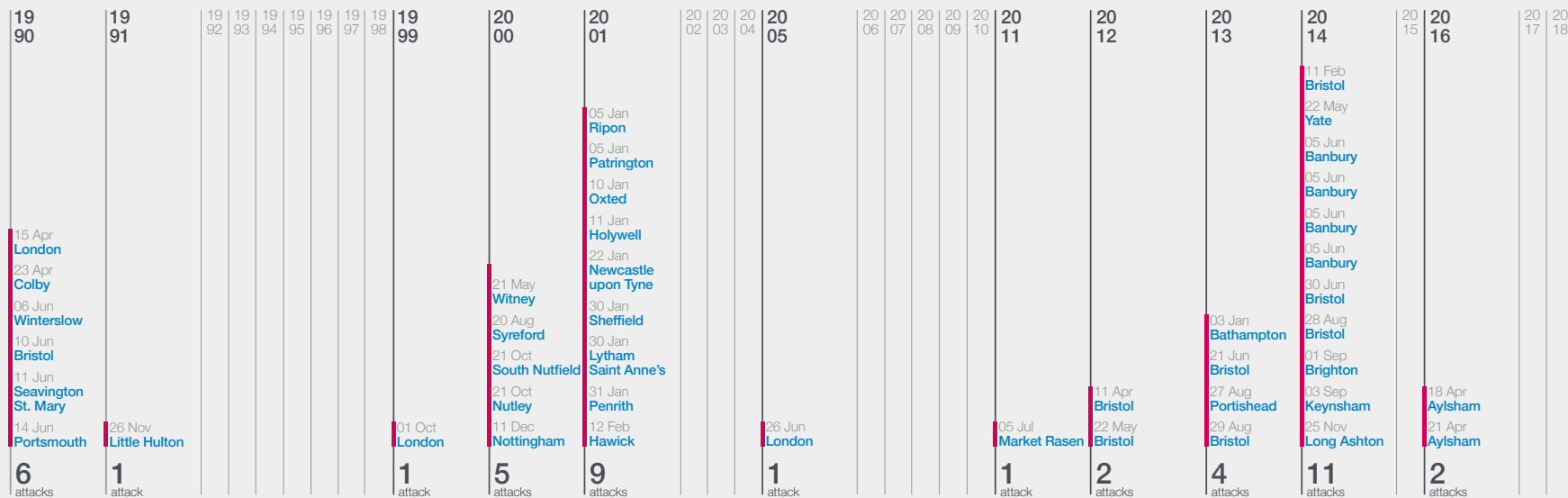
On 2 June, Counter Terrorism Policing North East arrested 32-year-old Dominic Noble from Huddersfield as part of an investigation into suspected far-left terrorism. Noble was charged with some 14 offences relating to the possession or viewing of documents likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terror.

Whilst the charges in this case do not suggest that the individual planned to mount an attack imminently, the arrest is noteworthy as terrorist plots involving far-left actors are rare in the UK. The Global Terrorism Database recorded only 43 attacks by far-left actors in Great Britain 1990-2019, and the majority of these have been arson attacks or bombings against infrastructure or industrial targets.

With growing political polarisation across the West, there is a realistic possibility of an increase in attack planning by far-left actors. However, leftist groups have typically eschewed indiscriminate or mass casualty attacks in favour of assassinations or non-lethal attacks against symbolic targets. ■

<sup>1</sup> The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) is produced by the National Consortium of for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. The GTD is provided to Pool Re by CHC Global (<https://www.chcglobal.co.uk/gtd/>).

Timeline of attacks by left-wing extremists in Great Britain since 1990



The UK has seen some instances of left-wing terrorism since 1990, although these constitute a fraction of the total attacks. Far-left attacks in the UK are exclusively attributed to either environmental and animal rights extremists or anarchists, with no instances of Marxist-Leninist terrorism being recorded by the Global Terrorism Database. Attacks by left-wing extremism tend to be concentrated geographically and temporally, largely reflecting sporadic campaigns of attacks by collocated extremist collectives.

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## Al-Qaeda leader killed in the Sahel

French forces killed the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in a military operation in northern Mali on Wednesday, 3 June. Abdelmalek Droukdel was in charge of all AQ-affiliates in North Africa and also commanded Al-Qaeda's Sahel affiliate, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM).

Droukdel became the leader of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat in 2004 and oversaw the groups' integration into Al-Qaeda in 2006. Although the Maghreb branch of AQ was initially focused on Algeria and Mauritania, it expanded its area of operation into the wider Sahel from 2011, and was responsible for the 2013 In Amenas gas facility attack. However, AQIM has never been linked to a successful attack in the West, although in 2009 French police arrested a French-Algerian scientist working at CERN and his brother for connections to AQIM.

The lack of Western operations linked to AQIM is due to the fact that most of AQ's operations against the West

are coordinated by its Yemen-branch, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP members were behind the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks and the 2010 aircraft bomb plot in which police discovered bombs on planes at East Midlands Airport in Nottinghamshire and in Dubai. However, the group's capabilities outside of Yemen have been limited in recent years.

AQIM will likely seek to avenge Droukdel's death in the coming months, which increases the risk for Western interests in the Sahel in the medium term. Whilst Droukdel's death presents a symbolic blow to AQIM leadership, its operational capacity is likely to be unchanged. Moreover, although the group will probably continue to attempt to incite attacks in the West, it is unlikely that the group will engage in planning viable revenge attacks in Western countries or allocate more resources to its propaganda efforts. ■



A picture taken on May 28, 2020, shows the village of Talhandak, some 80km northwest of Tessalit in northern Mali, where the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Abdelmalek Droukdel is reported to have been killed by French forces on June 4. (Photo by -/AFP via Getty Images).

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## US Neo-Nazi soldier arrested for planning attack on own unit

Ethan Melzer, a 22-year-old private in the US army was arrested on 10 June for conspiracy to orchestrate an attack on his own army unit while deployed abroad. Melzer was a member of the Order of Nine Angles (O9A), a Satanic group broadly affiliated with the far-right. He shared information on his unit's deployment on a O9A-related chat and with a purported member of Al Qaeda in order to facilitate an attack.

The O9A is an occult group, founded in the UK in the 1960s, that describes itself as 'Satanic' in nature, with its ideology shared widely amongst Neo-Nazis and far-right forums online. The group's supporters have expressed support for Islamist extremism due to their shared hostility of the West's Judeo-Christian traditions.

The incident underscores longstanding concerns about right-wing extremists infiltrating the military to access weapons, training and intelligence which could be used in attacks. Several serving British soldiers were jailed in 2018 for their membership of the neo-Nazi group National Action. However, Melzer's alleged intent to attack his own unit is unusual.

Equally peculiar is the reported connection between Melzer and a member of Al-Qaeda. While the actual identity of the latter remains unclear, it is curious that a member of a far-right organisation would seek to cooperate with Islamist extremists. While both share hostility towards pluralistic liberal

democracy, right-wing and Islamist extremists are typically antagonist, with both citing violence by the other as justification for their actions. ■

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Pool Re  
**SOLUTIONS**  
Building resilience against terrorism risk

 **Risk Awareness**

 **Risk Modelling**

 **Risk Management**

### Understanding risk, enabling resilience

Whilst the human cost of terrorism is devastating, the financial impact an incident can have on communities, businesses and economies is generally greater than most realise.

At Pool Re we understand that terrorism is a significant multi-faceted peril that can expose businesses in a complex way. Like many other catastrophic perils, terrorism is a challenge which requires a collaborative approach.

We have been the UK's leading terrorism reinsurer for over a quarter of a century. During this time our SOLUTIONS division have developed a specialist team of

experts who can work with you to help you and your Policyholders understand and manage the terrorism threat.

We believe all organisations and businesses can benefit from a better understanding of the terrorism risk solutions available.

To find out more about Pool Re SOLUTIONS and how your organisation can take advantage of this service please contact us at:  
**solutions@poolre.co.uk**

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